Received: 3 September 2018 | Revised: 15 July 2020 | Accepted: 6 August 2020

DOI: 10.1111/1745-9125.12258

CRIMINOLOGY

ARTICLE

Redemption and reproach: Religion and carceral control in action among women in prison

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The author would like to thank Randall Collins, Stephanie DiPietro, Peter Francis Harvey, Heidi Grundetjern, Annette Lareau, Aliya Rao, Patricia Tevington, Melissa Wilde, and Sarah Zelner, as well as Jody Miller, three anonymous reviewers, and the Poverty and Inequality Research Lab at Johns Hopkins University for constructive feedback on this manuscript. This work was supported by the American Council of Learned Societies, the Association for the Sociology of Religion, the Louisville Institute, the National Science Foundation [DGE-0822], the Religious Research Association, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. Any opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

Funding information
National Science Foundation, Grant/Award Number: DGE-0822; American Council of Learned Societies, Grant/Award Number: Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellowship; Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, Grant/Award Number: Honorary

Abstract
Criminologists are increasingly interested in how a variety of justice-adjacent institutions scaffold surveillance and punishment in the U.S. criminal justice system. A relevant but understudied institution within the carceral state is that of religion. Drawing on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork inside a U.S. state women's prison, I interrogate how religion—predominately conservative and evangelical Protestantism—served dual purposes in light of carceral control. Religion offered redemptive narratives to counter punitive carceral narratives promulgated by the state. At the same time, this narrative shift from "flawed" to "faithful" prescribed particular forms of embodiment: avoiding fights and rejecting sexual relationships with women. These forms of Protestant embodiment aligned with carceral purposes, such that women who reprimanded others for breaching religious norms were simultaneously enforcing prison rules. Although rhetorically challenging official prison narratives on the meaning of incarceration, Protestant narratives in practice regulated women's emotional and sexual behaviors and fostered a system of informal surveillance among incarcerated women. These findings illuminate how organizational narratives are linked to individual action. More broadly, they suggest how an

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Charlotte W. Newcombe Dissertation Fellow; Association for the Sociology of Religion; Religious Research Association; Louisville Institute, Grant/Award Number: Dissertation Fellowship

institution such as religion can undergird state authority within an intractable context of carceral control.

KEYWORDS
carceral control, ethnography, incarcerated women, narrative identity, religion, sexuality

1 INTRODUCTION

A long-standing body of research on the harms of incarceration highlights the importance of carceral narratives. State officials propagate overwhelmingly punitive, individualistic narratives around what it means to be imprisoned, describing convicted persons as dangerous, blameworthy, and pathologically flawed, without reference to the structural inequality that funnels disadvantaged groups through the criminal justice system (Allen, 1981; Feeley & Simon, 1992; Garland, 2001; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Simon, 1993). These carceral narratives draw on stereotypes around race, class, and gender to regulate and control prisoners' bodies, behaviors, and identities (e.g. Belknap, 2010; Haney, 2010; McCorkel, 2013). Interrogating these narratives is crucial, especially among under-researched populations such as incarcerated women (Kruttschnitt & Hussemann, 2008), to understand how discourses undergird carceral control in the lived prison experience.

More recently, scholars have begun to consider how carceral narratives proliferate not only among prison officials but also among organizational actors who work inside, around, and adjacent to formal correctional institutions. Punishment itself is no longer believed to be confined to corrections but woven across a sprawling web of interconnected institutions (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012; Kaufman, Kaiser, & Rumpf, 2018). The same is true for carceral narratives. Carceral narratives operate through "shadow carceral" institutions that fall squarely under legal purview, including administrative and civil courts, immigration courts, parole offices, and clerks' offices (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012; Schoenfeld, 2016). Beyond shadow carceral institutions, evidence points to an ever-widening net of carceral control through institutions that are not formally viewed as criminal justice apparatuses (Kaufman et al., 2018; Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015), including schools (Brayne, 2014; Flores, 2016; Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017; Shedd, 2015), hospitals (Lara-Millán, 2014), and rehabilitation programs (Miller, 2014; Schept, 2015). Working together, these justice-adjacent institutions reflect and amplify carceral control through punitive narratives and close surveillance (Clear, 2007; Rios, 2011).

One influential but generally overlooked institution tied to carceral control is that of religion (Guzman, 2020). Given religion's powerful role in U.S. society, and its role among disadvantaged communities and women of color (Schnabel, 2020; Sullivan, 2012), we might expect religion to matter for experiences of punishment. After all, religion permeates U.S. correctional institutions on a daily basis (Becci & Dubler, 2017) and serves a central role in reentry programs (Flores, 2018; Guzman, 2020). The limited existing research suggests religion as a potential counternarrative to punitive state rhetoric among justice-involved individuals. Research almost exclusively on incarcerated men shows how religious narratives offer feelings of self-worth, hope, and a sense of greater purpose (Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken, & Dammer, 2000; Cooney & Phillips, 2013; Dubler, 2013; Hallett, Hays, Johnson, Jang, & Duwe, 2017; Kerley, 2014; Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006). Religious narratives offer men a sense of redemption (Erzen, 2017; Johnson, 2011) that can lead to gang disengagement (Flores, 2014, 2018; Johnson & Densley, 2018) and even criminal desistance (Maruna, 2001, 2004; Vaughan, 2007). We know far less, however, about the role of religion among incarcerated women, who face unique pathways to incarceration (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009), a markedly different prison social order (McCorkel, 2013), and gendered pains of imprisonment (Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017). Given these gender differences and the expanding net of carceral control, further analysis is warranted on religion within and around the carceral state.

The current article examines how particular religious narratives operate on the ground inside a women's prison. I draw on observations from 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in one U.S. state women's correctional facility that I call "Mapleside Prison,"[1] along with hundreds of conversations with prisoners, staff, volunteers, and prison officials, and 18 in-depth interviews. In the findings, I first show that evangelical and socially conservative Protestant programs, the most prevalent religious programs at Mapleside, offered meaningful counter-narratives of redemption. Consistent with findings reported in prior literature, these redemptive narratives served as a valuable contrast to the state's classification of women as "pathologically flawed" offenders. Second, diverging from prior literature, I show how these Protestant narratives were enacted in everyday situations within the intractable prison context. Devout Christian women enacted redemption through embodiment and reproach. The most prevalent forms of embodiment involved avoiding fights and rejecting sexual relationships with women.[2] Many devout women further enacted their redemptive narratives by reproaching others who did not adopt these forms of embodiment. These forms of narrative enactment buoyed state control by regulating women's emotions and sexuality, and by enforcing conformity to norms aligned with both Protestant Christianity and the prison itself. Mechanisms of embodiment and reproach illuminate how dominant organizational narratives can connect to individual action. These findings suggest how an institution such as religion can offer a meaningful, discursive challenge to official penal narratives while being bound up within the normative regimes of the coercive prison context to ultimately work in tandem with carceral control.

2 | NARRATIVES OF THE INCARCERATED SELF

2.1 | Organizational narratives and narrative identity

Narratives—defined as the stories we tell about ourselves—construct and maintain identity. Narratives are more than a recounting of past events and behaviors; rather, narratives require proactively selecting and interpreting past events to develop a coherent story about the self (Presser & Sandberg, 2015). Narratives imbue prior experiences with meaning (Somers, 1994). The telling of one's narrative is a dynamic process that involves decision-making and a selective filter, shifting over time to incorporate new experiences (Miller, Carbone-Lopez, & Gunderman, 2015; Presser & Sandberg, 2015). Narratives are both interpretive and constitutive, mediating the past and constructing a sense of coherence in their retelling (Presser, 2009; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016).

Individuals craft personal narratives by piecing together narratives drawn from culture, institutions, organizations, and peers (Loseke, 2007). This article focuses on the intersection between micro-level personal narratives and meso-level narratives from organizations and institutions.[3] Organizations generate a variety of narratives that individuals adopt or reject, to varying degrees. For instance, drug rehabilitation programs offer narratives on identity related to addiction (McCorkel, 2003; McKim, 2017), and gangs offer narratives on identity related to gender and sexual orientation (Miller, 2008; Panfil, 2017; Ralph, 2014). Organizational narratives are normative, insofar as they proffer particular interpretations of the self that are aligned with the goals of the organization. As such, actors must learn organizational narratives to successfully interact with representatives of the organization (Douglas, 1986; Loseke, 2007). Although individuals select and interpret narratives from a variety of sources, the available narratives in a given field, including from key organizations, create the "conditions of possibility" (Foucault, 1977) "for how lives and worlds are constructed" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 378).

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[1] All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

[2] Language related to sexuality is drawn from "An Ally's Guide to Terminology" by GLAAD and the Movement Advancement Project, https://www.lgbtmap.org/allys-guide-to-terminology.

How do narratives shape action? Although "granting primacy to narrative in human action" (Presser & Sandberg, 2015, p. 1) is a primary goal in this paradigm, narrative criminology has admittedly lagged behind sociology in linking narrative to action. Sociologists often view narratives as *post hoc* rationalizing of prior action (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014), rather than spurring individuals to action. Recently, however, Winchester and Green (2019) argued that narratives both justify prior actions and motivate a sustained course of future actions. After all, individuals try to act in ways that are consistent with the self-conceptions they have narrated (McAdams, 1988; Miller et al., 2015). Viewing narratives as a framework on "how the world works" (Young, 2004), individuals draw on narratives to make sense of their actions (Mills, 1940). Narratives may operate alongside a number of prior experiences to guide future action when it comes to violence (DiPietro, 2018), drug use (Copes, 2016), and criminalized activity (Presser, 2009), yet we know far less on how narratives matter for an array of other behaviors related to deviance and punishment (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016). Furthermore, analysis of how organizational and institutional narratives matter for individual actions are missing from these debates. In this article, I posit that institutions such as prison and religion offer normative narratives that individuals may draw on to interpret and motivate their actions.

2.2 | Punitive narratives of carceral control

The late twentieth-century prison boom and its concomitant economic and political interests shaped official organizational narratives on the incarcerated self (Goodman, Page, & Phelps, 2017). State narratives conceived of imprisonment as a mechanism to control "aggregates of dangerous groups" that threatened perceptions of public safety (Feeley & Simon, 1992, p. 449). Rising rates of incarceration, particularly in poor communities of color, were accompanied by shifting narratives away from rehabilitation toward retribution, or "deserved" punishment (Allen, 1981; Simon, 1993). Following suit, today's prison narratives encourage incarcerated individuals to see themselves as flawed and blameworthy, manifesting a pathological "criminal" identity distinct from that of law-abiding citizens (Garland, 2001; Haney, 2010; Hannah-Moffat, 2001). Prison officials tout responsibilization narratives that disregard the role of structural disadvantage in crime and punishment (Calavita & Jenness, 2015). Even rehabilitative correctional programs, trying to avoid the punitive rhetoric of conventional penal programs, rely on neoliberal or pathological narratives describing offenders as unfit, flawed, or damaged (Goodman, 2012; McCorkel, 2013; Schept, 2015).

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[3] Here, prison and religion are *institutions* in the broad sense, whereas Mapleside Prison itself and the specific Protestant churches that volunteer there offer *organizational* narratives.

Organizational carceral narratives are not monolithic. Intersectional identities around race, class, and gender shape official narratives regarding those viewed as deviant. Today, women account for 7.5 percent of the U.S. prison population, and Black and Latina women continue to be incarcerated at disproportionate rates compared with White women (Bronson & Carson, 2019). Incarcerated women are doubly punished, not only as offenders, but also as women (Grundetjern, 2015; Irvine-Baker et al., 2019; Lempert, 2016; McCorkel, 2003). Per the "empowerment" paradox, the state encourages women to take responsibility for their crimes while leaning into feminine submissiveness (Bosworth, 1999; Carlen, 1983; Haney, 1996; Hannah-Moffat, 2000; McCorkel, 2003). Prison officials denounce incarcerated women of color through gendered and racialized rhetoric, policing women's bodies through regulation of their diet, gender presentation, sexuality, and parenting strategies (Belknap, 2010; Comfort, 2007; McCorkel, 2013; Roberts, 2004). Overall, prison narratives mobilize stereotypes around race, social class, and gender to punish not only the crime but also the person herself.

Criminal justice institutions are not the only institutions that surveil individuals and proliferate carceral narratives. There is also a shadow carceral state, including civil and administrative authorities "not officially recognized as 'penal'… [that] nonetheless acquired the capacity to impose punitive sanctions" (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012, p. 222; see also Schoenfeld, 2016). Beyond the shadow carceral institutions that have overt authority to sanction, many other organizations are complicit with—and even strengthen—state surveillance and penal control through a web of bureaucratic and hierarchical relationships (Gottschalk, 2008; Kaufman et al., 2018). Some of these act as surveillance institutions on their own, whereas others act underneath the auspices of the correctional system itself. Examples include primary and secondary schools (Brayne, 2014; Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017; Shedd, 2015), hospitals (Lara-Millán, 2014), drug treatment programs (Kaufman et al., 2018; Schept, 2015), and other social service programs "where the state's capacities to rehabilitate… [are] offloaded onto community-based actors and organizations" (Miller, 2014, p. 327; see also Gustafson, 2011). Although these institutions may seem disconnected from carceral control, they function in tandem with law enforcement, courts, and corrections. Individuals navigate these institutions as a "pipeline" (Hirschfield, 2008), "control complex" (Rios, 2011), or what Miller (2014) called "an enduring collusion" (p. 307) of "wraparound incarceration" (Flores, 2016). When institutions operate inside correctional facilities themselves, such as educational programs within juvenile detention facilities (Flores, 2016) or drug treatment programs within prisons (McCorkel, 2013), they necessarily operate as an arm of surveillance while furthering their own aims. This is not to suggest a coordinated, conspiratorial effort (Schoenfeld, 2011) but a fractured, fragmented amalgamation of overlapping institutions (Rubin & Phelps, 2017) with real consequences. The organizations that operate inside, around, and adjacent to correctional institutions may perpetuate novel narratives, surveillance, and sanctions in furtherance of penal goals (Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015). The purpose of the current article is to interrogate how one such institution—religion—operates within this web of coercive carceral control.

2.3 | Religion as counter-narrative?

A small but growing body of research suggests that religion is an important institution connected to the criminal justice system, with potential implications for carceral narratives. Religion holds a long-standing, specially protected place in contemporary punishment, one worthy of interrogation (Becci & Dubler, 2017). Although today's U.S. prisons ostensibly split from their religious origins (Graber, 2011; Skotnicki, 2000), religion retains a central role in the prison experience. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 constitutionally mandated religious freedom for prisoners. This legislation, alongside a rapid decline in funding for secular programs, paved the way for faith-based programs to be one of the few activities available to the entire jail and prison population (Erzen, 2017). Where religion falls in relationship to carceral control, whether operating in perfect harmony or perpetual discord, is an open question.

Religion is likely to be relevant for punitive narratives given that it offers a language of forgiveness for past crimes (Erzen, 2017; Johnson, 2011; Maruna et al., 2006). Religious narratives generate feelings of moral worth and purpose among the incarcerated (Aday, Krabill, & Deaton-Owens, 2014; Bosworth, 1999; Clear et al., 2000; Cooney & Phillips, 2008; Dubler, 2013; Hallett et al., 2017; Johnson, 2017; Kerley, 2014). Viewing narratives derived from religious organizations as "redemption scripts" (Maruna, 2001) suggests a valuable contrast to punitive state narratives of offenders as pathologically deviant. Religious narratives are a resource for "'up front' work" or a "hook for change" (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002) to connote a cognitive shift away from deviant identities.

Religious narratives not only shift perspectives on the meaning of past crimes but also have practical applications for normative behavior and even desistance. Religious participation may be accompanied by concrete behaviors, including prayer, formal attire, and avoidance of alcohol and tobacco (Johnson & Densley, 2018). Religious narratives can facilitate prosocial community engagement (Flores & Cossyleon, 2016) and activism (Flores, 2018). Religious-based redemption narratives can be a central component of "making good," showing that "the desisting ex-offender 'changed'" (Maruna, 2001, p. 10) by adhering to conventional social norms and avoiding deviant behavior (Kerley & Copes, 2009; Sundt & Cullen, 1998). Overall, prior research suggests that religion may function as a counter-narrative to punitive prison narratives in interpretive ways, with practical implications for prosocial future action.

Questions remain, however, on the role of religious narratives regarding carceral control. For one, existing research draws almost entirely on data from men in prison. Moreover, much of this scholarship draws on interviews at one point in time; less is known about whether and how religious narratives matter for everyday interactions inside environments designed to punish. Finally, scant research has considered religion as a potential part of the interwoven system of carceral control (Guzman, 2020 is a notable exception). There is evidence of a symbiotic administrative relationship between religion—particularly Protestantism—and the prison institution in the United States and the United Kingdom (Beckford & Gilliat, 1998; Sullivan, 2009). Given that religion is necessarily operating within an intractably coercive context, we must bring a critical lens to the empirical question of how religious narratives matter for punishment behind prison walls.

3 | THE PRESENT STUDY

I draw on a yearlong ethnography of religious life inside one U.S. state women's prison. In what follows, I demonstrate that women drew on Protestant narratives to construct a redemptive identity that contrasted punitive prison narratives, supporting previous findings on incarcerated men. Then, diverging from prior scholarship, I examine how redemptive narratives were enacted in everyday situations, finding that religious narratives ultimately buoyed state control in their regulation of women's bodies, emotions, and sexuality. I interrogate how mechanisms of embodiment and reproach linked organizational narratives to individual actions. When women drew on Protestant narratives to construct moral authority and sanction each other, these forms of enactment ultimately served carceral purposes, with women enlisted to enforce institutional rules among themselves.

This article explores a unique case, asking how incarcerated women negotiated and enacted narratives when it came to their religious and carceral identities. Yet the findings presented here have broader implications beyond these empirical specifics. For one, these findings offer insights into a population that is generally hidden from view: that of incarcerated women. Despite the substantial share of justice-involved women, comprising 18 percent of the total correctional population (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014), the amount of research on women's correctional experiences remains scarce, except for a few high-quality studies on the gendered experience of punishment (e.g., Haney, 2010; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2005; McCorkel, 2013; Owen, 1998). The shortage of research on women in prison is compounded by oft-noted institutional barriers to qualitative research inside prison walls (Arriola, 2006; Calavita & Jenness, 2013; Simon, 2000; Wacquant, 2002). Furthermore, an ethnographic approach is crucial for understanding the circumstances under which individuals select and enact particular narratives through routine, observable behavior (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

Next, my findings demonstrate how religious narratives can operate in everyday life. Although growing (albeit limited) scholarly attention focuses on the interpretive meanings of religious narratives inside prison (Clear et al., 2000; Maruna et al., 2006), far less is known about implications for behavior. I found that religion does more than offer a counter-narrative to punitive prison rhetoric. The ways in which Protestant narratives were enacted complicates our understanding of the relationship between religion and punishment, showing how religion can operate as an institution of informal carceral control given the coercive prison context.

4 | DATA AND METHOD

The data for this article are drawn from 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork I conducted inside a correctional facility called "Mapleside Prison" from April 2014 through May 2015.[4] Mapleside is a state women's prison in the eastern United States, confining approximately 1,000 women of all security levels from minimum to maximum. The confined population comprises about even proportions of Black and White women, and a lower share of Latina women.[5] Ages range from 17 to older than 80, with an average age of 36.[6] Average length of stay is 3.5 years, and sentences range from seven months to life without parole. The largest shares of women are convicted of drug offenses (around 17 percent) and murder (around 20 percent), with the next most common offenses being larceny (around 15 percent) and assault (around 15 percent).

I conducted observations at Mapleside 2 to 4 days per week, for 2 to 9 hours per day, averaging 3.5 hours per visit. I gained permission to observe activities in the "Main Hall," the building that houses the gym, dining hall, classrooms, computer lab, volunteer coordinator's office, religious library, and chaplain's office. In the course of observations, I conducted semistructured field interviews with hundreds of prisoners, officers, volunteers, and staff. Additionally, I spent several hours per week doing office work for Chaplain Gibson, the full-time chaplain on staff, completing tasks like filing, photocopying, mailing letters, making phone calls, and taking messages. One

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[4] I secured approval from my university's institutional review board through a full review process, along with approval from Mapleside administrators and the Department of Corrections' own extensive review process.

[5] Percentages withheld to protect the identity of the prison.

[6] Parameters available only as means rather than medians.

TABLE 1 Religious affiliation of incarcerated population at Mapleside Prison (N = 1,000)

Religious Group	**Percent Affiliated**
Protestant[a]	63.0
Catholic	7.0
Sunni Muslim	5.0
Lutheran	4.5
Wiccan	3.5
Seventh-day Adventist	3.0
Jehovah's Witness	2.0
Nation of Islam	2.0
None	2.0
Jewish	1.5

Notes: Based on official records of the entire prison population in January 2015, coded by author. Parameters are presented in percentage form to disguise the identity of the prison. Percentages do not total 100 because of exclusion of smaller groups that did not hold services at the time of the research (e.g., Native American and Moorish Scientist).

[a] Classification per Official Religious Designation Form. Includes African Methodist Episcopal, Apostolic, Baptist, Pentecostal, and other denominations. Worship services are held jointly for these groups under the Protestant umbrella; Bible studies are held separately.

correctional officer invited me for "sit-alongs" in the Main Hall, where I observed her interactions with incarcerated women and then asked for her perspective on each encounter. I became a familiar face through these activities, gaining access to almost every room and corridor in the Main Hall. This enabled me to witness countless interactions between those who lived and worked inside prison walls.

Furthermore, I observed formal religious programs in the Main Hall. For the first 2 months of my fieldwork, I observed worship services and scriptural studies for Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Sunni Muslim groups. For the following 10 months, I focused on the largest religious group at Mapleside Prison, the "Protestants," who comprised 63.0 percent of the prisoner population, based on self-identified affiliation, and are the subject of this article (table 1).[7] Of those affiliated with a given denomination, approximately 50 percent participated in religious programs, according to Chaplain Gibson: "I would say 50/50 [participate]. For some, it's a crucial part of their survival. Others are not engaged at all." Although official statistics are unavailable, this estimate seemed consistent with my yearlong observations.

The Protestant group was an umbrella affiliation for a range of Christian traditions, which held a single worship service for an average of 260 churchgoers each week, with separate denominational Bible studies. This group is difficult to categorize precisely because it encompassed a wide variety of denominations, contingent on which outside churches sent volunteer preachers. As Dana, a woman in her late 30s, complained, "We have different groups coming into the pulpit. We get a smorgasbord of religion. We can't expect a consistent Word [of God]; we have to pick and choose what fits." For the calendar year 2015, I coded the denominational affiliation of each outside preacher who led Sunday worship services (table 2). The largest share of volunteers identified as Baptist (44.0 percent), and the second largest share identified as nondenominational Christians (26.0 percent), primarily charismatic and socially conservative in flavor. These volunteers would

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[7] Every person, upon admittance to prison, completes a religious preference form, which allows her to attend religious studies and worship services for one religious affiliation. She must submit paperwork to convert religions.

TABLE 2 Denominational affiliation of Protestant volunteers at Mapleside Prison, 2015 (N = 27)

Denomination	Percent Affiliated (*n*)
Baptist	44.0 (12)
Nondenominational	26.0 (7)
African Methodist Episcopal	11.0 (3)
Pentecostal/Apostolic	8.0 (2)
Other	11.0 (3)

be classified by sociologists of religion as evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants (Steensland et al., 2000), encompassing a diversity in traditions from African Methodist Episcopal to Baptist and Pentecostal (Barnes, 2014; Shelton & Cobb, 2017).

I observed Sunday church services, Baptist Bible study, AME Bible study, nondenominational youth Bible study for women younger than 25, ministry classes, Christian witness training courses, discipleship classes, self-help classes, and weekly religious movie screenings. I attended special events, including "GospelFest," where incarcerated Christian women showcased their ministerial talents, a weekend-long nondenominational Christian "retreat" in the prison library, a Christmas caroling event held in the gym, and two weekend-long nondenominational Christian revival meetings. Additionally, I conducted observations on major holidays, including Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

To glean self-narratives, I also conducted formal interviews. Although these interviews were difficult to coordinate because of the lack of privacy, I conducted in-depth interviews with 18 incarcerated women, both religious and secular: 9 Protestants, 3 Catholics, 2 Jews, 1 Jehovah's Witnesses, and 3 Agnostics/Atheists. Interviews were semistructured, asking questions about life prior to incarceration, during incarceration, and plans postrelease. Interviewees were asked about their attitudes and beliefs around religion, family, sexual orientation, prison rules, daily routines, and so on. I was prohibited from bringing a tape recorder inside the facility; instead I transcribed responses by hand in real time.

4.1 | Analytic strategy

Data analysis was conducted on the nearly 900 single-spaced pages of field notes and interview transcripts. Following an abductive theoretical approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), I first identified emergent themes. I printed out my notes and read them through once in full before commencing analysis. Next, I reread the entire 900 pages while drafting a list of emergent themes. These included topics like anger, behavior in church services, conversion, deprivations, family, forgiveness, freedom, friendship, girlfriends, health, money, parole, rules of prison, sexuality, trauma, womanhood, and worship styles. In total, I identified 187 emergent topics as codes for analysis. Importantly, as a result of the highly sensitive nature of data gathered from a vulnerable population, the IRB stipulated that only I could read through my field notes. For this reason, hiring multiple coders to evaluate reliability was impossible.

Codes were empirical topics, labeled as nouns. Coding nouns rather than verbs allows the researcher to identify variation later in the coding process (Deterding & Waters, 2018). For example, the "rules of prison" code included every instance of following the rules of prison, breaking the rules of prison, and discussing the rules of prison. Later, when I generated a "rules of prison" memo that listed each instance of the code, I could then create analytic codes for rule-breaking and rule-following, searching for patterns between individuals and across situations. This process enabled me to locate deviant cases for each code, ensuring that my coding scheme did not privilege upholding prison rules over breaking them, or vice versa.

Using the qualitative software program *Nvivo*, I identified the codes relevant for each and every sentence. An abductive approach centers on the importance of doubt and surprises, looking for unanticipated findings in light of existing literature (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). During data collection, memoing enabled me to explore surprising themes, which I then returned to the field to test. After data collection was complete, the abductive approach required me to continually revisit data, reread existing literature, and compare the utility of different theories as a framework for interpreting the findings.

Where existing theories do not fit, abduction seeks to uncover an appropriate theoretical framework (Peirce, 1931). For this reason, using tools available in *Nvivo*, I analyzed which codes yielded the highest frequency, which codes co-occurred, and which codes occurred less frequently than expected. I was surprised to find sexual orientation co-occurring repeatedly with the code for behavior in church services and co-occurring repeatedly with religious identity. I returned to the literature to compare my empirical findings to the predictions from prior scholarship. True to the abductive approach, these surprises informed my inquiry and formed the crux of my interpretation of the data.

Ethnographic observations of one prison cannot make generalizable claims about the nature of narratives and carceral control elsewhere. Nor can this type of research make causal or predictive claims about individual behavior. Instead, the strength of extended field observations includes the opportunity for a researcher to identify what is important to the subjects she studies (i.e., religious conversion and sexual orientation) by observing behavior and expressed attitudes over a period of time, rather than imposing categories of interest during time-constrained interviews. Although the strength of interviews includes asking directly about attitudes and beliefs, the strength of ethnography lies in observing behaviors that respondents may not describe during an interview. Drawing on field observations alongside in-depth interviews, this study combines the strengths of both methods. In this article, I connect self-reported attitudinal data from interviews with ethnographic observations that shed light on the social dynamics of participants in their circumscribed contexts.

4.2 | Ethical and reflexive considerations

As a result of ethical considerations when writing about behaviors prohibited by prison rules, great efforts were made to disguise any identifying data on the women who agreed to participate in this study (most of whom are still incarcerated as of this writing). Although ethnographic reporting would typically include detailed physical and background characteristics, these descriptors have been mostly removed as a precaution against the possibility of sanctions or retaliation against the women in this study. In describing the respondents, I did not use the same pseudonyms used in other publications resulting from this research to avoid potential risk of identification. Instead, I assigned a new pseudonym to each person described in this article and withheld defining background characteristics.

Sexuality turned out to be one important barometer of Protestant narrative enactment. As an abductive surprise in the field (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), I wanted to describe the reality of the patterns as they unfolded while maintaining sensitivity to a subject that has long been fodder for academic and popular portrayals of women's prisons. In the heyday of prison ethnography, a spate of researchers placed undue emphasis on women's sexuality in prison (cf. Freedman, 1996; Giallombardo, 1966; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). Women were said to cultivate romantic and familial relationships as a gendered form of adjustment to prison. This focus not only replicated normative family values, but it also sensationalized women's sexuality (Kunzel, 2008). In the present study, I revisit the dynamics of women's sexual relationships inside one U.S. state prison in hopes of offering greater care and attention to the ways that organizational narratives around the regulation of women's bodies and their intimate relationships permeated everyday experiences of punishment.

My identity as a White woman from a middle-class background shaped this research. Although it took 9 months of persistent effort to secure research access, it is likely that my privileged background ultimately facilitated official D.O.C. approval. In terms of rapport, there is no way for an outsider to fully understand what it feels like to be imprisoned. I approached incarcerated women and staff as experts on their own experiences. I was continually humbled by their enthusiasm and candor. My priorities in fieldwork were to ensure informed consent, to treat everyone with respect, and to establish a sincere connection. These priorities not only abided by IRB stipulations, but also they seemed to result in positive social interactions and trust among women from a variety of religious, racial, and class backgrounds. For instance, the first time I met Afia, a young Black Muslim woman, she plopped down next to me and playfully intoned, "I got some questions for you, little woman." I was heartened that Afia felt comfortable probing me about my research and personal life mere moments after consenting to participate, even though we came from different racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Questions and answers were a two-way street. Likewise, Lucille, a middle-aged Black Protestant woman, expressed joy about our weekly conversations: "It makes me feel like I'm not locked up! … People like you coming in here, we can talk about… what it's like in the real world." Finally, I was aware that my professional relationship with the chaplain could have impacted respondents' willingness to critically discuss topics related to religion and sexuality. I hoped that my Jewish and Catholic interfaith background, as an outsider to both Protestantism and the prison social order, might buffer this concern.

5 | FINDINGS

At Mapleside, Protestant narratives offered women an opportunity to construct and enact a redemptive narrative identity. In the first section, I demonstrate how Protestant redemptive narratives rhetorically contrasted punitive and pathological state narratives. In the second section, I draw on interviews and firsthand observations to demonstrate how Protestant redemptive narratives were enacted through embodiment. Narrators described embodying behavioral changes associated with their redemptive identity: avoiding fights and rejecting romantic relationships with women. Both of these forms of embodiment aligned with the norms of conservative and evangelical Protestant programs and aligned with the rules of the prison. The third section shows how the narrative shift from "flawed" to "faithful" fostered a sense of moral authority, which many women further enacted by renouncing others who did not embody redemptive narratives in the same way. When sanctioning each other, this enactment of Protestant narratives enforced the institutional rules that sought to govern incarcerated women's emotions and sexuality.

5.1 | Narrating a Protestant Redemptive Identity

Protestant programs challenged state narratives on the meaning of incarceration. Prior scholarship has demonstrated that religious redemptive narratives are powerful, helping those in prison conceive of themselves as worthy people with a meaningful purpose (e.g., Flores, 2018; Johnson, 2017). Challenging official state narratives of prison as punishment for "flawed" or "dangerous" people (Feeley & Simon, 1992; Garland, 2001), churchgoers at Mapleside drew on language of salvation and redemption to highlight God's role in the meaning of their incarceration.

For instance, Issy is serving a 10-year sentence while managing a number of chronic and debilitating illnesses. In the face of these hardships, she finds solace in her African Methodist Episcopal faith. Issy said she wakes up with a smile and feels grateful to be alive. "Some people thank God for saving them," she shared during a discipleship class one afternoon, "I thank God for *rescuing* me." Drawing on the dual meaning of the word "saved," Issy was grateful not only for her spiritual salvation but also for the divine intervention that physically removed her from a dangerous path that could have led to death and destruction.

Kendall likewise described divine intervention in her narrative around incarceration. Kendall is a woman in her early 20s. Observing her congenial disposition, it was difficult to imagine the hardships she endured in her past. While in prison, Kendall was displaced from the grind of illegal drug dealing, which she described as a vast improvement: "God saved me … putting me here." Kendall interpreted her prison sentence as an act guided by God, offering the opportunity to change course and understand her true self. "I've learned so much about myself from being here," she shared. "You don't know yourself until you come to a place like this, stripped of everything you have." Kendall attributed her newfound sense of self to God's role in her multiyear sentence.

Desirée, too, described how her belief in God transformed how she viewed her prison sentence. "When I first got here, I felt distant [from God]. I kept saying, 'God, where are you?'" Things gradually changed for Desirée as she deepened her Protestant faith: "[Now] I know He's always been with me. I realized He brought me here to get my attention." Desirée's statement suggested her emphasis on God's active role in formal punishment that "brought [her] here to get [her] attention."

Sondra described how Protestant Christianity offered her a redemptive identity, with God's love at the core of her redemption. One evening at a Baptist Bible study session, Sondra reflected tearfully, "[T]hese scriptures reinforced who I am in God's eyes." Sondra said she found meaning in scripture that defined her as more than her crime, as more than her 15-year sentence. Sondra's voice cracked as she continued: "I have been chosen by God and He loves me tremendously." For Sondra, God's love shifted her narrative identity from "criminal" to "Christian." Sondra put it succinctly: "I am not what I used to be because I've accepted Him as my Lord and Savior." Protestant narratives reframed Sondra's sense of self in a profound way.

Importantly, Protestant redemptive narratives were not just lip service. In saying "I am not what I used to be," Sondra signaled a behavioral transformation that she attributed to her religious conversion. This shift in narrative identity was linked to action. In the sections that follow, I examine how redemptive narrative identities were enacted through two key mechanisms: embodiment and reproach.

5.2 | Enacting protestant redemptive narratives through embodiment

To enact their Protestant redemptive identity, many women emphasized the importance of embodiment. Embodiment is when the physical body "is actively experienced, produced, sustained, and/or transformed as a subject" (Waskul & Vannini, 2006, p. 3). In the present case, religious embodiment is "a practice by which believers physically enact their faith" (Glassman, 2018, p. 36) by making particular decisions about their body as an expression of their religious selves. Religious embodiment practices are inextricably tied to institutional meanings (Avishai, 2008; Davidman, 2015; Rao, 2015), through which believers manifest their faith and demonstrate their religious commitment (McGuire, 2008). That is to say, religious institutions like churches, synagogues, and mosques promote particular modes of embodying religious identity.

Among devout Protestant women at Mapleside, there were two prevalent forms of embodying a redemptive Protestant identity: avoiding fights and rejecting sexual relationships with women. Both forms of embodiment aligned with norms of conservative and evangelical Protestantism; they also aligned with the rules of the prison. First, women described embodying their Protestant redemption by deescalating their responses to conflict.

Monique, for instance, is 30 years old with a peaceful smile. Still, she is not immune to prison fighting. One evening during a Protestant self-help class, after an especially trying altercation the day prior, Monique shared how her redemptive narrative identity guided her response. "My faith was tested yesterday," Monique began. "A sister-in-Christ said something to me. I won't say the details, but she said something to me that she should not have said." Monique sighed, frustrated by what had already been many years of harsh prison conditions rife with interpersonal conflict. "A while ago, I would've gotten real angry," she continued, "but God showed me where I stood as His child. To God be the glory." Monique's redemptive identity urged to her avoid fighting with another person. Because of "where [she] stood as His child," Monique tailored her behavior accordingly, linking her Protestant redemption to quelling her anger.

On a November night at the weekly Baptist Bible study session, Connie shared a similar story of how her Protestant redemption shaped her response toward conflict. Earlier that week, Connie arranged a meeting with Ms. Williams, her prison case manager. Connie reported that during the meeting, Ms. Williams "snapped" at her for "manipulating her way into a meeting." Connie admitted to her fellow Bible study attendees that this was an accurate assessment of the situation. Connie felt incensed, however, once Ms. Williams said forebodingly, "Your fate is in my hands." Connie was frustrated. "No, it's not," Connie continued, "My fate is not in her hands—it's in *God's* hands." Nevertheless, Connie drew on her redemptive Protestant narrative identity to avoid expressing anger. "I have changed," Connie shared with the group. "Everyone there saw that I have changed, 'cause I would have gone off on her. Instead, I just got up and left." Connie credited her Protestant redemption with avoiding confronting a prison staff member. "It felt like a burden has been lifted off of me," she reported with a sigh of relief.

In both of these cases, the imperative to avoid fighting to preserve a Protestant redemptive identity also aided in prison survival. Since fighting could lead to additional violence and discipline, this mode of enactment had tangible outcomes for navigating imprisonment. On the other hand, condemning anger and quelling emotional responses must be contextualized in a racialized history of casting Black women as "aggressive" (Dow, 2015; Harris-Perry, 2011) and clinging to stereotypes around race and gender when enforcing prison rules (Davis, 2003; McCorkel, 2013).

Embodying redemption by avoiding fights adheres to the rules and hierarchy of the prison, which is in line with both religious and carceral prescriptions for behavior.

Further demonstrating the salience of embodiment by avoiding fights, Oaklynn explained how her redemptive narrative identity inspired a behavioral change. “I used to be aggressive,” she recalled during an in-depth interview, “When I first got here [to prison], I was always fighting and cussing out officers and all that.” At first, Oaklynn rejected prison rules:

> They put me in the “butt naked” room [akin to solitary confinement] because I was cussing out officers and stuff. I was in there crying, looking up at the camera they have in there watching you, like, “Why?… Please help me!” When they slid in something to me under the door, I balled it up and threw it at the camera.

Now in her early 20s, Oaklynn is 3 years into her life sentence. Recalling the immense pain of those early days at Mapleside, she described her outlook: “I was looking at a life sentence plus 180 years. … How just is *that*? Getting all that time for a crime I didn’t do.” Yet over time, her Baptist faith has grown stronger, and her perspective has shifted. “Now I want God to use me, for real,” Oaklynn insisted, crediting her behavioral transformation with her salvation. “If you know better, you gotta do better,” she said ruefully.

What did Oaklynn mean by “do better?” For one, she said that she stopped “fighting and cussing out officers.” As with Monique and Connie, Oaklynn’s narrative shift away from being “aggressive,” as she put it, should be viewed in light of a long-standing history of policing Black women’s emotions (Dow, 2015; Harris-Perry, 2011), especially through punitive apparatuses (McCorkel, 2013). A second prevalent form of embodiment had to do with sexuality: The more time Oaklynn spent in Baptist Bible study classes and worship services, the more she felt certain that it was impossible to be both a lesbian and a Christian. “I can’t have *eternal life* if I practice that lifestyle,” she urged. Tracing the spine of her leather-bound Bible, Oaklynn looked at me pensively. “I don’t want to go to Hell, for real,” she shook her head, “So I stay away [from relationships with women].”

At Mapleside, the largest denominations of Protestantism adhered to conservative and evangelical traditions with heteronormative beliefs on sexual morality (Shelton & Cobb, 2017; Whitehead, 2010). Several incarcerated churchgoers shared what Moon (2005) called “conversion narratives” about their transition from having sexual relationships with women to becoming Christians. Since “conversion to God meant conversion away from homosexual ‘practice’” (Moon, 2005, p. 561), these women rejected their sexual relationships as another way to embody their redemptive Protestant identity.

Oaklynn was fervent in her decision to “stay away.” She recalled that in the past, “I used to think that as long as I was a good person, it didn’t matter if I was a lesbian,” Oaklynn reasoned, “I could still go to Heaven.” Now, she believes that relinquishing “that lifestyle,” as she put it, is crucial for embodying her redemption. When her ex-girlfriend tried to rekindle their relationship, Oaklynn demurred. “I wouldn’t want to start up a relationship with her again.” Oaklynn said that when “God told me to give up homosexuality,” it was a challenge. “It was hard as Hell,” she avowed, “That’s all I’ve ever known.” Oaklynn relied on the support of fellow Protestant women to help embody her faith. “I couldn’t have done it on my own. It helps to have a group of people here going through the same thing,” she explained. Oaklynn’s effort to “give up homosexuality” in favor of redemption was a well-trod paradigm at Mapleside. The numerous women “going through the same thing” supported each other through the challenge. Like fighting, sexual relationships of any kind were forbidden by prison officials (Borchert, 2016; Gorga & Oehman, 2017; Jenness, Sexton, & Sumner, 2019), such that this form of embodiment also aligned with institutional rules.

In a one-on-one interview, Lucille shared her own "conversion narrative" of embodying redemption by rejecting her sexual orientation. Lucille's sexual orientation was a long-standing source of inner strife, even prior to her incarceration. "Every day for 30 years, I would pray the same prayer," she said wistfully. Lucille paused to reflect on those decades of heartache. She shared her prayer: "If [being gay is] wrong, God, make me right." Meanwhile, Lucille continued dating women, believing that if God had not intervened, then her sexual orientation was not immoral after all. During her first few years at Mapleside, Lucille "played around a little," she said, continuing to have romantic relationships with women.

Over the years, Lucille became an active participant in Protestant programs. She attended worship services every Sunday, as well as ministry and Bible study programs nearly every day of the week. What changed for Lucille was a transformative night in her cell. She described it vividly: "It was midnight, it had just become my birthday. I was alone in my cell." As she spoke, Lucille shifted in her seat from a slouch to an upright, prayerful pose, clasping her hands together. She lifted her chin and looked up at the ceiling, reflecting, "There has to be more. This isn't it for me." Lucille sought a deeper purpose in life and believed that it required not being gay.

"I used to be a homosexual," Lucille said with a look of dismay at her own past. "I'm not anymore," she asserted, pressing both her hands flat atop her heart. "After that night, I never engaged in homosexuality again. I didn't want it anymore." For Lucille, the shift was sudden and absolute. Leafing through her Bible, Lucille turned to *Leviticus 20:13* and recited scripture that called being gay a "detestable sin." Lucille said she realized that it was a "sexual sin" rather than an issue of "loving women." She explained, "You not supposed to have sex outside of marriage no matter what. And the only real marriage is between a man and a woman."

Now, years later, Lucille mentors a handful of younger women at Mapleside seeking to rebuke their sexual orientation for religious reasons. "Ironically, I ended up here [in prison] around 1,000 women for it to be relinquished," Lucille commented. She even plans to start a "Same Sex Attraction Ministry" inside prison to help others attain "deliverance from homosexuality." Like Oaklynn, Lucille's embodiment connected her to a community of women at Mapleside seeking to enact their redemption in the same way.

In another in-depth interview, Giselle shared how she embodied redemption by rejecting her sexual orientation. It was the day before Thanksgiving, and Giselle and I had an uncharacteristic degree of privacy in a classroom in the Main Hall. As a result of treacherous wintry conditions, most voluntary activities were canceled, and the compound was quieter than usual, allowing for candid conversation. "I used to engage in homosexual activity," Giselle began. As it was for Lucille, Giselle's transformation was instantaneous: "It was like a light switch," Giselle snapped her fingers for emphasis. "I don't do that no more. It just stopped." As the brisk November air crept in through old window panes, I sat perched on the heater, listening to Giselle speak:

> I was a lesbian before I got here, and I never thought there was anything wrong with that. Or, I knew it was wrong, but I didn't think I had to change anything. When I first came to Christ, I thought I could keep doin' it.

Giselle chuckled, dismissive of her previous belief that it was feasible to be both a lesbian and a "saved" Protestant. The smile disappeared from her face as she continued her testimony. "One day, I was sitting on the floor in my room reading my Bible," Giselle described, "when my fingertips started to feel like they was on fire." Giselle wiggled her fingers to demonstrate. "I threw my Bible on the ground. I was scared; I didn't know what was happening." Miming the scene, Giselle recreated the fateful moment in her cell. "I picked [the Bible] up again, and my hands felt hot.

That's deliverance. I was delivered." I asked what she meant by deliverance, and Giselle explained, "it's when you're released from a stronghold, released from your demons." Giselle's deliverance was embodied through a physical sensation: Her fingertips feeling "on fire" when she touched her Bible meant that she couldn't "keep doin' it." In telling this narrative, Giselle showed how embodying "deliverance" from her sexual orientation was central to her testimony of Protestant redemption.

Not all devout Protestant women, however, conformed to this pattern of embodiment related to sexuality. Seneca and Ginger, for instance, are dating each other, and they attend Bible study and worship services together every week. One week at a youth Bible study session with 15 other attendees, they raised the subject of their relationship. "I go to church with my girlfriend, and we really pay attention," Seneca insisted. Ginger chimed in, agreeing that their relationship does not preclude their Protestant faith: "We go [to church services] together, but she really listen. Seneca is humble. She always listening to the preacher." Ginger was well aware that other Protestant women doubted their commitment because they were dating. "If we're talking [during worship services], we'll talk about what we're hearing in the sermon." Ginger was adamant. "[Seneca] listen to the Word [of God]. I do, too." Seneca and Ginger felt compelled to defend the legitimacy of their redemption given their breach of the prevalent form of embodiment around sexual relationships.

Rebecca also refused to embody salvation by rejecting her sexual orientation. For the first few months of her imprisonment, Rebecca attended Catholic worship services because she was raised Catholic. Yet Rebecca stopped attending once her sexual orientation was criticized. As she described in an interview, "The priest turned me off immediately when I said I was married to a woman. I'm *legally* married to a woman. … He said he didn't even recognize my divorce [from a man] since it wasn't an annulment." Rebecca started attending Lutheran worship services instead "because one of the volunteers who comes in is a lesbian. I didn't want to go to services where they condemn homosexuality." Lutheran services met separately from the Protestant worship services as they did not adhere to an evangelical or charismatic denominational tradition. Although it was important for Rebecca to maintain her faith while incarcerated, she was steadfast: "I'm not gonna be told not to be a lesbian."

Viewed as deviant cases, Seneca, Ginger, and Rebecca resisted rejecting their romantic relationships as a form of embodiment. They did, however, feel obliged to defend their decisions to participate in Protestant programs, unlike Lucille, Giselle, Oaklynn, and countless others who were never called to do so. The fact that Ginger, Seneca, and Rebecca stood firm in their religious devotion without rejecting their romantic relationships demonstrates that embodiment is a negotiated practice, derived from normative institutional narratives but enacted by individuals.

Avoiding fights and rejecting sexual relationships were two prevalent ways that women sought to embody their Protestant narrative identities. Notably, both forms of embodiment pertained to what women would *no longer* do. Embodying religious commitment often involves sacrificing mainstream behaviors or common vices (Glassman, 2018; Johnson & Densley, 2018). These sacrifices take on an additional meaning in an environment defined by deprivations. Although these forms of embodiment coincided with normative Protestant ideology, they also aligned with the rules of the prison, which prohibited both fighting and sexual relationships. The next section will interrogate how these forms of embodiment ultimately served institutional purposes by enlisting incarcerated women as enforcers of these prison rules.

5.3 | Enacting Protestant Redemptive Narratives Through Reproach

Generally, when individuals incorporate an organizational narrative into their identity, they do so in relation to proximate peers. As Copes (2016) described, “identity construction involves discussing who we are in relation to who we are not” (p. 194). As this section will demonstrate, the forms of embodiment promoted by conservative Protestant narratives afforded a sense of moral authority, aligning with both normative religious and carceral mores. Devout Christian women further enacted redemptive narratives by enforcing these norms among themselves. In this way, conservative Protestant religion, within the context of carceral control, enlisted women as enforcers of norms in conformity with prison rules, mirroring the ways that prison officials rely on incarcerated individuals to maintain the status quo (McCorkel, 2013; Skarbek, 2014; Walker, 2016).

Some Protestant devotees took issue with women in relationships with women. This became clear in several field interviews. As Christine complained, “There’s a lot of lesbianism here. Some go [to church] to meet partners.” Dana, an active participant in Protestant programs, agreed: “Really it’s just the first three rows [who are there to worship]—everyone else uses it to sit down with their girlfriend.” As Oaklynn described gravely, “I know you see a lot of girlfriends in here, girls sitting together real close. That really bothers me.” In these statements, the women I spoke to adopted a critical tone, renouncing couples in worship services through verbal condemnation. Women in relationships were familiar with this condemnation, as Seneca and Ginger illustrated above.

Previous literature has suggested that religious programs in prison are a space where couples spend time together (Fleisher & Krienert, 2009). At Mapleside, on Sundays, absent work assignments or alternative voluntary activities, Protestant worship services were one of the only places to spend time with a partner who lived in another housing unit. Chaplain Gibson was well aware of this, and once took to the pulpit at a Sunday morning worship service to issue a formal reproach: “Don’t just be one of those people who go to church to hook up. Be who God wants you to be.” Chaplain Gibson urged churchgoers to participate in religious services—and she viewed the use of worship services as time to “hook up” as antithetical to being “who God wants you to be.” The chaplain said that she once banned a churchgoer from Protestant programs who was “being inappropriate with another woman during the service.”

Ethnographic observations brought to light how Protestant women who rejected relationships with women reprimanded others for failing to do so. One of the ways this occurred was through direct confrontation. For instance, at a jovial Christmas caroling event, approximately 120 women relished a rare moment of joy during an otherwise bleak holiday season. The pain of being separated from loved ones was palpable on the compound, where the tinsel-lined doorway to the visiting room did little to rouse spirits. That night, volunteers paraded around the prison gym in Santa Claus hats and jingling reindeer necklaces, rallying attendees to sing and dance to songs like “Deck the Halls” and “Joy to the World.” The atmosphere was raucous as women appeared to throw themselves into the jubilant energy of the evening. When Mercy, a devout Protestant woman, spotted a couple twerking (dancing in a sexually explicit manner), however, she took it upon herself to police the behavior. Mercy stepped forward and gestured vigorously toward the couple, crying out, “Uh huh! None of that!” Mercy saw fit to sanction the couple for dancing together in what she viewed as an inappropriate manner. In reprimanding women for sexualized physical contact, Mercy was enforcing the same rules handed down by the prison.

Reproach also occurred by informing prison officials. This was one of the most overt ways that prison officials used Protestant women to enforce institutional rules. Because all sexual relationships in prison are forbidden, reporting sexual activity could lead to punitive censure, including disciplinary tickets and solitary confinement (Borchert, 2016; Gorga & Oehman, 2017; Jenness et al., 2019). Aware of these possible outcomes, several Protestant women snitched to prison officials during one-on-one meetings with Chaplain Gibson, through anonymous notes dropped in the chaplain's mailbox, and via complaints to the warden. These interventions indicated how—in moments large and small—devout Protestant women felt empowered to intervene in ways that regulated women's bodies and their expressions of affection.

For example, one afternoon while I was volunteering to help Chaplain Gibson with office tasks, I was sorting through the chaplain's "inmate mail," as she called it. I spotted a letter from Jeanine, a Protestant woman complaining about hypocrisy within the Protestant group. This letter was like many others I came across when Chaplain Gibson tasked me with reading and summarizing the copious mail she received weekly. This particular letter began, "All the choir members have girlfriends, and they think it's okay." Jeanine found it troubling that those who sang on the church choir had girlfriends. She closed her letter with a plaintive query: "When will this end?" Jeanine did not name names but instead was so disgruntled with the situation that she described "all" members of the Protestant choir as having girlfriends. Jeanine sought to alert Chaplain Gibson to what she saw as an irreconcilable tension between women who purported to be Protestant but were in relationships with women, hoping that Chaplain Gibson would intervene.

Reporting romantic couples to Chaplain Gibson was, at times, more targeted. Natalia, a 40-something woman, was one such target. Lucille, who was Natalia's friend, explained to me that Natalia stopped participating in religious activities because of what transpired. According to Lucille, Natalia "stepped down" from her ministerial role in Protestant programs because "she is seeing a girl." Lucille sounded nonchalant as though this sort of situation happened all of the time. Queenie, another acquaintance, did not believe that Natalia stepped down by choice. Glancing around the room to see whether anyone was listening, Queenie leaned forward and shared, "[Natalia] got into a relationship. She wasn't *forced* out, but she didn't feel comfortable." Queenie spoke in hushed tones, treading carefully to avoid implicating herself in the contentious situation. "You know there's a feeling that people are looking at you?" Queenie asked rhetorically, wagering her best guess as to why Natalia stepped down. "She might have felt condemned for her lifestyle. I didn't judge her, but other people did," Queenie ventured. After explaining that some other Protestant women "condemned" Natalia "for her lifestyle," she mouthed the name of the devout Protestant woman she believed to have snitched to Chaplain Gibson about Natalia's relationship. In this scenario, Natalia was ousted from her participation in Protestant ministry programs because others viewed her relationship as being at odds with her salvation.

Four months later, a similar problem arose, this time implicating Queenie. Lucille approached me with concerns. "I still haven't spoken to Queenie," Lucille said, sounding dismayed, "She is not in her walk [with God]." Lucille whispered to share what she believed to be a damning secret: "[Queenie] is in a relationship with a woman. Now I've known about this, but I didn't want to do anything until I had proof, until I was sure." Lucille felt certain that Queenie's relationship contradicted her Protestant redemptive identity. "I'm trying not to judge," she levied, having previously described relinquishing her own lesbian orientation. "I'm trying to make sure to approach her in love, but it's hard," Lucille continued. I recognized that telling me about this prior to speaking with Queenie was perhaps its own form of sanction; meanwhile entrusting me as a researcher to keep this information confidential and pseudonymous. "I'm not trying to rat her out or anything," Lucille insisted, "A lot of people drop notes in Chaplain Gibson's box. I don't do that; I don't think that's right." Lucille was well aware of the prevalence of writing anonymous letters to the chaplain to report Protestant women in relationships. Instead, she chose to discuss her concerns privately with Queenie. This form of reproach was direct and personal, demonstrating that the goal was not to "rat her out" but to "approach her in love" to bring to light her purported wrongdoings. Nonetheless, this condemnation of Queenie's relationship showed that Lucille felt emboldened to speak up at this breach of a prevalent form of embodiment.

Finally, some women reported romantic couples directly to prison administrators. Bobbi, for instance, was a weekly attendee of Catholic worship services. As mentioned earlier, similar to Protestant messages, Catholic messages were not immune to intolerance around sexual orientation.[8] Bobbi explained in a field interview that she never dated women: "We're the minority here—they call us 'strictly dickly.'" When two women sat close together in the back row of a Catholic worship service, Bobbi was incensed. "I am going to write the warden about this," she fumed. "You cannot mess with my church service. This is what keeps me going through the week. This service recharges me. I can't have people coming in here exchanging drugs or doing girlfriend stuff in the back row." Religious services were what kept Bobbi "going through the week." She viewed "doing girlfriend stuff" on par with "exchanging drugs" as illicit behavior that deserved reproach. Bobbi was quick to report a complaint to the warden. This religiously narrated reproach reinforced carceral control that sought to regulate women's bodies in the same way.

Of course, there was variation in the extent to which devout Protestants renounced the sexuality of others. Dana, a Pentecostal churchgoer, described her perspective in an interview: "I used to be angry about it." Dana identified as straight and never felt compelled to embody her redemption by rejecting relationships with women. Nevertheless, seeing couples sitting together during worship services bothered Dana to the point of making her "angry." Over time, Dana's outlook softened. "[A]ll sin will prevent you from reaching the Kingdom [of Heaven]," she explained. Placing being gay alongside the sin of bearing false witness, Dana reasoned, "If someone is a lesbian, and I lie, we're just as wrong." Perhaps because Dana's religious embodiment did not require her to eschew her own sexual orientation, her sense of moral authority seemed not to hinge on this form of reproach.

Collectively, incarcerated women who embodied redemptive narratives in normative ways enacted their concomitant moral authority by reprimanding others through direct intervention and reporting to those with the authority to dole out discipline. Although Protestant redemptive narratives rhetorically challenged punitive state narratives, they supported carceral purposes when they led women to enforce these institutional rules among themselves.

6 | DISCUSSION

This article has interrogated how religious narratives, predominately from conservative and evangelical Protestant denominations, mattered for the enactment of carceral narrative identities inside one U.S. state women's prison. At Mapleside, Protestant messages offered a redemptive identity, which some Protestant women embodied by avoiding fights and rejecting sexual relationships. Conferring a sense of moral authority, women who drew on redemptive Protestant narratives admonished others for failing to relinquish their sexual relationships. On one level, a narrative of redemption brought about by religion challenged punitive carceral narratives of women as flawed or dangerous criminals. Taking a deeper dive into the on-the-ground implications of these redemptive religious narratives, however, we see a micro-level manifestation of carceral control by a justice-adjacent institution in action. Protestant narratives were bound up within the normative regimes of the prison that sought to govern women's bodies, emotions, and behaviors. Inside such a coercive context, wherein state control dictates nearly every aspect of the prison experience, religion is reconfigured such that it works in tandem to support state aims—even if it rhetorically opposes those aims by redefining incarceration as a turning point toward redemption.

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[8] Although beyond the scope of this article, interviews and observations suggested that elements of Protestant narratives were found in other denominations, a finding perhaps unsurprising given the "protestantization" of the prison chapel noted by Dubler (2013).

The findings indicate that religion plays a role in shaping normative discourses around race, class, and gender in women's correctional facilities (see also Ellis, 2018). When religion regulated women's bodies and behaviors, it did so in line with prison rules and carceral purposes that have long sought to control the emotions and sexuality of women—disproportionately Black and Latina women (Haney, 2010; McCorkel, 2013). As a result, the women profiled in this article navigated stereotypes and competing sources of stigma around gender, sexuality, and carceral status. Already facing the "double deviance" of being a justice-involved woman (Grundetjern, 2015), the interpretive importance of a redemptive religious identity must not be overlooked. For some, it involved avoiding fighting and other expressions of anger. For others, shedding the carceral stigma through religious redemption required levying an additional penalty of stigma over their relationships. Ethnographies of women's prisons have emphasized the state's punitive, paternalistic approach that dictates women's sexual desires (Belknap, 2010; Haney, 2010; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; McCorkel, 2013) and encourages feminine behavior (Bosworth, 1999; Carlen, 1983), especially among incarcerated women of color. We see that religion, too, becomes a potential mechanism of social control inside a women's prison when it shapes prescriptive narratives around incarcerated women's emotions and sexuality.

Theoretically, by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, this article offers a unique opportunity to link narrative identity to observable action. Whereas researchers have demonstrated how religious beliefs can offer feelings of self-worth and redemption for men in prison (Aday et al., 2014; Clear et al., 2000; Maruna et al., 2006), they have generally stopped short of interrogating how this attitudinal shift shapes individual action. A handful of studies have illustrated that participation in religious programs reduces aggression (Kerley, 2014; Kerley, Matthews, & Blanchard, 2005) and can even facilitate gang disengagement (Johnson, 2017) and desistance (Hallett et al., 2017). Many of these studies rely on retrospective interviews to account for behavior. Observations over the course of 1 year illuminated how narratives were enacted in everyday social interactions and embodied in prescribed ways. Until now, scholarship on narrative identity has primarily focused on its relationship with future offending (Copes, 2016; DiPietro, 2018; Presser, 2009). By introducing observational data connecting narratives to action, I show how narratives are cultivated and protected through embodiment and reproach. Rather than "knifing off" their prior deviance (Laub & Sampson, 2001), many incarcerated women called on their narrative shift from "flawed" to "faithful" to motivate their behavioral change (see Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Roy, 2007). Importantly, personal narratives were shaped in large part by organizational narratives. Viewing narratives as an interpretive, constitutive framework (Mills, 1940; Presser, 2009; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016) that can motivate a sustained course of action (Winchester & Green, 2019), future work must take seriously the normative narratives promoted by organizations when it comes to offending, desisting, and other topics of criminological interest.

This article suggests mechanisms by which religion operates within the carceral state, capable of offering meaningful redemption while supporting punitive aims. Religion's importance in the penal context is a result, in part, of its role as a major U.S. institution, as well as a result of the extent to which it permeates U.S. correctional facilities as a constitutionally protected right (Becci & Dubler, 2017). To conceive of religion as "sacred" or "set apart" (per Durkheim, 2001) obscures the realities of how religion plays out on the ground (but see Guzman, 2020), especially within a correctional context. As this article shows, religion—like other institutions connected to carceral control such as schools and hospitals (Brayne, 2014; Flores, 2016; Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017; Lara-Millán, 2014; Shedd, 2015)—created a normative set of behavioral expectations (embodiment), through which devout women constructed an informal system of surveillance to enforce these norms (reproach). As is typical within the carceral state, wherein institutions are inextricably tied to the "control complex" (Rios, 2011; see also Flores, 2016), embodying and enforcing these Christian norms was connected to formal institutional discipline, in this case, by the prison administration.

The findings presented above remind us that social meanings are locally constructed, even among theologically and culturally similar religious denominations. Context matters when it comes to interpreting the relationship between religion and carceral control. First, context matters because incarcerated women are not offered much choice on the religious messages they receive from volunteer clergy. Prison officials have discretion in selecting volunteers and coordinating religious programs, with substantial latitude in assessing the appropriateness of a given volunteer. Given the lengthy, bureaucratic screening process, the prison administration inevitably filters the religious messages made available to incarcerated women. Comparing the findings presented above with scholarship on religion and reentry (Flores, 2014, 2018; Maruna, 2001, 2004) must take into account the available religious narratives and the environment in which they are interpreted. Second, prison context matters because incarcerated churchgoers live alongside their coreligionists, leading to greater surveillance of each other's everyday behavior. Their enactment of narrative identity through reproach must be interpreted within this context of a closed society, in which policing others' behaviors is categorically more commonplace (e.g. Copes, Brookman, & Brown, 2013). Third, prison context matters because of the legacy of racialized and gendered punishment in the United States that seeks to discourage aggression and sexual expression among incarcerated women of color (Davis, 2003; Freedman, 1996). In fact, the narratives and forms of enactment described above differ from studies on how religion outside prison drives group cohesion and collective action (e.g., Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Wood, 2002). Nevertheless, these findings support a growing body of literature on the far-reaching grip of carceral control (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012; Kaufman et al., 2018; Schoenfeld, 2016; Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015). That religion serves prison institutional aims in this case while challenging normative state rhetoric must be interpreted as falling within the severely restricted array of possible actions in the carceral environment (see also Farrall, Bottoms, & Shapland, 2010). Overall, when religious narratives challenged punitive, pathologizing state narratives on incarcerated women, they offered deeply meaningful redemption scripts. When religious narratives were used to socialize women to avoid fighting and adopt a normative sexual orientation, they bolstered carceral control within an ever-widening net of justice-adjacent institutions.

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How to cite this article: Ellis R. Redemption and reproach: Religion and carceral control in action among women in prison. *Criminology*. 2020;58:747–772. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12258